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The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Integration of gender perspective in humanitarian action

Massive human displacements are taking place in the developing and less developed countries and their pace seem to grow with no stabilization at sight. Unfortunately, similar to other mass human displacements in history, today's displacements, be it within or beyond the borders of the states, continue to cause large-scale human tragedies. These mass displacements and human tragedies they entail are more alarming than ever, as they are intertwined with the ongoing violent conflicts, environmental degradation and natural disasters. The size of the problem today is beyond the capacity of the international community to respond adequately, which creates the need for a careful reassessment of the humanitarian action framework.

As always, women are at the forefront as victims and actors. They are disproportionately affected by the conflicts, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters as they are much more vulnerable, often submissive and under heavy responsibilities for caring for the rest of the family. They are facing long journeys as refugees into exile or living in insecure environments. Women and girls are subject to sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, forced impregnation, forced abortion, trafficking, and sexual slavery. Therefore, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) puts a specific emphasis on the situation of women in its guidelines for working with refugees:

In many societies, women and girls face specific risks and are less likely than men and boys to have access to their rights, due to their gender roles and position in society. In situations of displacement, these risks – particularly discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence – can be exacerbated. Community support structures break down and traditional or formal justice systems may not uphold women's rights. Unaccompanied women and girls, women heads of households and pregnant, disabled or older women may face particular challenges.[1]

In its Draft Strategic Plan for 2014-2017 UN-Women underlines the following, in line with the objectives of Journalists and Writers Foundation's (JWF) Istanbul Summit:

> Following successive Security Council resolutions on the global and UN system-wide response to supporting women's role in conflict resolution and prevention, UN-Women has been tasked with a number of key coordination priorities. (…) UN-Women will develop the capacity of concerned actors to assess gender-specific needs and coordinate humanitarian action, including in formulating Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies which ensure women's empowerment in the development of the longer term resilience of their communities and in the implementation of sustainable humanitarian action and, in the case of disaster response, meeting immediate gender responsive survival needs.[2]

Within this general conceptual framework, the second Istanbul Summit was held in Istanbul on 9-10 May, 2015, bringing together over 100 civil society organizations (CSOs) and international organizations with 300 participants,

[1] 07.11.2014, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c1d9.html
[2] 20.10.2014, http://www.unwomen.org/~/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2013/annual%20session/developmentresultsframework-2014-2017%20pdf.pdf

including 20 MPs, from 51 countries. It was organized by the JWF, a CSO with General Consultative Status at the UN ECOSOC. Main partners of the Summit are the African Union, Kimse Yok Mu International Humanitarian Aid and Development Association with Special Consultative Status at the UN ECOSOC. In addition, 34 local supporter organizations from 25 different countries joined the Summit. The Summit supported UN Women's HeForShe campaign.

Believing that 'with the appropriate support, refugee women can improve their lives and the lives of their children, families and communities'[3], Istanbul Summit 2015 aimed to convey a strong message for the full participation of women in all decisions affecting their lives. Besides, it aimed to raise awareness of the international community to the plight of the refugees and displaced persons in the war torn areas, especially of the Middle East, by emphasizing the special condition of women refugees and displaced persons.

The forum issued a final declaration prepared by the Final Declaration Preparatory Committee consisting of academics and experts, the Working Groups Outcomes which summarize the discussion of the working groups and a Call for Action of the parliamentary roundtable.

The Summit highlighted gender as a central component in the definition, planning and execution of humanitarian action. The Final Declaration reflects the key points that emerged from the rich deliberations during the Summit. It outlines the general principles of gender-sensitive humanitarian action with a specific focus on women as beneficiaries and actors.

In its Final Declaration[4], The Summit;

Recalls that, in order to be effective, humanitarian action needs to be inclusive and engage women as active participants at all levels;

Underlines that humanitarian action that embraces the principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality should explicitly emphasize gender sensitivity;

Expresses that humanitarian action must be cognizant of the humanity and dignity of the recipients of humanitarian assistance and protection. Accordingly, it should embrace the letter and the spirit of "do no harm";

Emphasizes the need for women, both as actors and beneficiaries, to be part of all levels of decision-making, including the design, planning, execution and monitoring of humanitarian action so as to ensure cost-effectiveness;

Urges humanitarian donors to ensure that gender is a key criteria for making funding decisions;

Prioritizes context-sensitive humanitarian action by taking into account local, political, cultural realities and indigenous factors;

[3] 07.11.2014,http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c1d9.html
[4] 22.08.2015, http://www.istanbulsummit.org/summit-2015/documents

Recognizes that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) increases in humanitarian crises. National and local crisis-management systems must be gender-sensitive as a primary SGBV prevention measure;

Emphasizes that humanitarian intervention should be cognizant of the elevated risk to women's reproductive health during crises situations, leading to increased levels of maternal mortality and deteriorated mental wellness, and respond accordingly;

Calls for gender-sensitive and -balanced reporting by journalists, capturing the diversity of women's perspectives and experiences, not only as victims but as survivors, defenders, witnesses and actors;

Urges nation-states and non-state actors to recognize their responsibilities in active prevention of refugee-like situations, including internal displacement, bearing in mind that women and children make up the vast majority of the world's refugee/IDP population;

Calls upon the international community to recognize the key role of an empowered local civil society, including women's organizations, in effectively addressing humanitarian crises;

Welcomes the upcoming conference of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in December 2015 in Geneva, and World Humanitarian Summit in June 2016 in Istanbul, and calls upon them to incorporate the outcomes of the "Istanbul Summit 2015: Women as the Beneficiaries and Actors of Humanitarian Action."

At the Summit, Parliamentarian roundtable discussion was conducted on 'Gender-sensitive humanitarian action'. There were 21 representatives, mostly parliamentarians, from 15 different countries. The list of the countries which were represented at the Roundtable as follows: Argentina, Benin, Ecuador, Ghana, Guinea, India, Kazakhstan, Kurdistan Regional Government, Liberia, Peru, Republic of Iraq, Russia, Somalia, Tanzania and Ukraine. After putting their observations, they call the governments and international community for action[5]:

1. Small action committees/groups involving women parliamentary members, journalists, activists and others in influential positions, especially in corporate sector, should be organized in order to address humanitarian, social and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced women for a sustain- able solution.

2. Parliamentary members in the host countries should be the voice and representative of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, as well as their citizens.

3. For the Public-Private-Partnership to be strong and effective, the private sector should adopt a clear orientation for action, key performance indications, and a monitoring mechanism.

4. To ensure a long term vision for humanitarian assistance, a closer link between humanitarian responses and national development plans should be developed.

[5] 20.08.2015, http://www.istanbulsummit.org/summit-2015/documents

5. Knowledge about women's rights, and especially the rights of mothers, should be integrated into the educational system from primary school to university in every country.

6. The needs for protection among refugee women, as well as older and disabled women, should be evaluated, and they should be consulted regarding improvements of their daily life.

7. Women are the positive actors of change, therefore their participation in the decision-making process and their self-sufficiency should be ensured by providing them with the adequate resources.

To put a better implementation of gender perspective in humanitarian action, 5 working groups were held with participation of especially CSO members and experts from the field. With the working groups conducted on Gender Sensitive Emergency Response, Empowerment of Women Refugees and Long Term Resilience, Role of CSOs and Responsibilities of State Authorities, Preventing Abuse of Women Refugees and IDPs, Do no harm, the participants prepared a "to do list" regarding the basic and urgent needs of humanitarian action. They strongly demanded better integration of gender perspective by the following declarations:

1. There should be binding international protocols for emergency responses, which national governments should adopt in their emergency response policies. National governments and NGOs should collaborate on emergency responses.

2. Emergency organization and assessment teams should consist of men and women in equal numbers.

3. Raising awareness through education and social media campaigns is needed at all levels of society to take initiatives in different emergency situations. Women should be encouraged more to take part in emergency organizations. School curricula should be revised to include lessons on emergency responses.

4. The demographic data in emergency situations, especially on vulnerable groups such as children, women, disabled people, and elderly people, should be accurate, up-to-date and globally accessible.

5. It is critical to create confidence in the refugees. We believe that instilling self-confidence in the women refugees will propel them forward and empower them to gain control over their lives once again. Confidence breeds empowerment.

6. Given the many barriers and issues facing refugees, mentoring and counseling should be provided and encouraged. There should be role models for them to emulate and to see a path forward.

7. Governance should be affirmed as a multicultural concept and practice affecting countries and regions differently. Civil societies and state must therefore share power in governance to the service, protection and empowerment of people.

8. Common strategies between States and CSOs should be developed for progressive and political societies which will generate dialogue and capacity building egalitarian systems towards the empowerment of women.

9. Empowerment of local actors, especially women organizations is needed to intervene in the local contexts for effectiveness and cultural sensitivity."

10. One way to prevent abuse would be to establish local women councils in order to create a better ways of communications and dialogue between governments and local communities.

11. Women who have lost their husband in war are left with the burden of the whole family. These women should be empowered, through the development of soft skills, so that they can make a living for their family.

12. Kidnapping, abduction and rape cause psychological damage and social neglect for women. In order to reintegrate these women back into the society, NGOs should organize seminars and establish necessary social structures.

13. Another abuse is the lack of access to sufficient health care, which is the responsibility of governments. In case where governments does not fulfill this obligation sufficiently, we encourage the civil society organizations and international community to step in and put pressure on their governments.

14. Some abuse of women is related to the abuse of religion. One solution could be to promote interfaith dialogue and to keep religious and government affairs separately. It is also important not to link any religion with terrorism.

15. The contextual realities should be systematically mapped and addressed where the humanitarian action is undertaken and the findings should be utilized to design, plan, execute and monitor the actions.

16. The use of Do No Harm principle should be emphasized and adopted as an approach in the delivery of humanitarian action.

17. Translation (Operationalization) of policies into conflict sensitive humanitarian processes and actions are essential to create cumulative positive impact for the communities (beneficiaries).